

VZCZCXRO3342
RR RUEHCHI
DE RUEHBK #2271/01 1130833
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 230833Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6404
INFO RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 3458

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002271

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TAGS: PREL KPAO TH

SUBJECT: BANGKOK "SPEAK EASY CLUB" AND "SPEAKERS SQUAD" HOOK EMBASSY
PERSONNEL ON TELLING AMERICA'S STORY

¶1. Summary: For the Public Affairs section (PA), outreach is key to maintaining and strengthening our generally positive relationship with the Thai public. But telling America's story to over 62 million Thais is a colossal task. In an effort to take public diplomacy "the last three feet" and touch the lives of as many different Thai audiences as possible, PA launched two new initiatives - the Bangkok Speak Easy Club and the Embassy Speakers Squad. While continuing to connect with the Bangkok elite, the Speakers Squad enables us to reach many more young, provincial Thai audiences throughout the country at relatively low cost, while the Speak Easy Club provides essential skills to employees and builds camaraderie among diverse Mission personnel. End Summary.

Two Interdependent Programs

¶2. The Speak Easy Club is a monthly public speaking training program conducted in both Thai and English, open to the Mission community and their family members. More than one hundred Thai and American mission personnel have attended the first six sessions of the Speak Easy Club. Its goals are twofold: to help people become better speakers; and, to persuade them to join the Embassy "Speakers Squad," which is an expanded Embassy speakers program (described more fully below). PA set a goal of completing twenty Embassy outreach programs by the end of the fiscal year, which we expect to meet; over twenty Thai schools and civic groups have already signed up to host Embassy speaker programs this year.

Why Are We Doing This?

¶3. PA staff realized that we have a huge potential pool of public speaking talent in our 'regional hub' mission that is largely untapped and untrained. Our Thai staff in particular expressed interest in outreach, but felt unprepared and untrained. By offering this training, we are building up not only the human capital of Embassy Bangkok's most important resource -- its own staff -- but also the confidence of a significant number of Mission personnel to get up in front of a crowd of strangers and deliver a message about America to target audiences around the country.

A Mission-Wide Program Using Professional Trainers

¶4. The Speak Easy Club, which met for the first time in February 2007, benefited from the generosity of the U.S.-Thai Fulbright Commission's Thai Executive Director -- a professional public speaking trainer and close PA contact -- who volunteered her time and expertise to facilitate the first two training sessions. Since then, PA engaged a Thai professor from the prestigious Chulalongkorn University Language Institute and a private public speaking trainer to lead subsequent Speak Easy Club sessions in Thai and English, respectively. Because this relatively low-cost training benefits the entire mission, it is being paid for using ICASS funds, not PA program funds.

¶15. So far, the results for the Speak Easy have been extremely encouraging, surpassing our initial hopes and expectations. Turnout was standing room only for the opening session, so we asked people to pre-register, limited attendance per session, and opened up a second English session to accommodate all those who were interested.

The Bangkok Speak Easy draws participants literally from throughout the Embassy, including the Consular Section, Financial Management Center, Financial Service Center, Regional Diplomatic Courier Division, Regional Medical Office, Information Management, Protocol, Regional Human Resources Office, Regional Employee Development Center, General Services Office, US Trade and Development Agency, Open Source Center, US Agency for International Development, Transportation Security Administration, Narcotic Affairs Section, Force Protection Detachment, Marine Security Guard Detachment and our own Public Affairs staff. Most surprising is the number of Thai staff, often shy to speak up among American officers in formal situations, who have joined the English Speak Easy sessions - sometimes outnumbering the Americans in the room. Notably, several Thai Consular staff, regulars at the English Speak Easy Club, are using the sessions to polish presentations about the U.S. visa application process that they will give to Embassy Bangkok's incoming pool of Thai summer interns.

¶16. So how did PA recruit participation in these programs from throughout the Embassy? First, the Public Affairs Officer presented the idea to the Country Team, which was extremely receptive and agreed that their staff could participate. Then PA makes it easy by offering, in most cases, to cover internal travel costs, per diem, lodging and transportation for programs outside Bangkok. This provides an incentive for the speaker to volunteer and relieves the speaker's agency or section of any associated costs. Also, PA coordinates the logistics for each speaker program. The speaker comes up with an idea, and PA finds the audience, selects the date,

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and often accompanies the speaker with armfuls of promotional items.

In the past few months, PA staff personally visited embassy agencies and sections and explained both programs to staff and managers. Meanwhile, PA runs ads in "About Bangkok," the Embassy newsletter, with information about both programs, and hangs Speak Easy promotional posters around the embassy.

So Who's Been Going Out to Speak?

¶17. This program has already expanded the "public face" of the American Embassy. Not surprisingly, entry level officers -- many of them consular officers -- have been among our most eager volunteers as well as our own PA staff; we've also attracted Thai staff and incorporated an American Chamber of Commerce trade assistant within this program. Program topics have included women's leadership, the civil rights movement, Thai films in the United States, the American high school experience, and environmental issues. A USAID Thai staff member spoke twice at Thailand Knowledge Park, Bangkok's largest interactive library, on environment protection and global warming. The second time was an encore performance; his program was so popular that TK Park members requested that he return. A Thai secretary in PA led an Earth Day program at the same venue.

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¶18. PA is using this program both within Bangkok and to reach out to younger, wider audiences throughout Thailand's 76 provinces in order to connect with people who have little and often no first-hand experience with Americans and American culture. PA has arranged programs in Northern and Southern provinces, including programs in Chiang Mai, Satun and Trang. PA has also targeted Thailand's five American Corners, which provide excellent programming platforms to connect with scores of university students. Three of the American Corners are located in the south, one in the north, and one in the northeast.

¶19. As a result of the Speak Easy Club and Embassy Speakers Squad programs, all Mission staff, both Thai and American, have an opportunity to both improve their public speaking and further the

Mission goal of increasing mutual understanding among Thai audiences. This Embassy, one of the largest in the world, in turn becomes a smaller place as Thais and Americans from different sections and agencies find opportunities to work together. This program is only a couple of months old, so we will need more time to evaluate these programs fully. However, post is excited about the new blood that this initiative is pumping into the Mission's public outreach efforts and we believe that long-term benefits to transformational diplomacy efforts will result.

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